

The New Jersey Shore...

"Alpha" (above) and "Bravo" (below) phases in the life of U.S. Coast Guardsmen. Former shows craft returning to station at Monmouth Beach from duty run; stand-by status pictures cutter approaching Romer Shoal Light off Sandy Hook. In right background is outward-bound Cristoforo Colombo of the Italian Line.



Coast Guardsmen's Lingo, Starting with 'Alpha' and 'Bravo,' Describes Endless Chores of the 'Semper Paratus' (Always Ready) Sailors Patrolling State's Shore

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

COAST GUARDSMEN along the New Jersey Shore live out their service in A, B, C fashion—or, in service lingo, in Alpha, Bravo and Charlie fashion. Alpha is that time when boats are under way on duty, Bravo is standby status ready for quick action, and Charlie is the rare period when boats are laid up for major repairs.

Charlie can mean a somewhat eased few days in dry dock, when the pressures of bucking the cruel sea are not so imminent. It can be a good time, maybe a time for small talk and relaxation—even while putting a 600-horsepower motor in shape for patrolling the Atlantic Ocean.

These days, however, as one Coast Guardsman sums it up, "we're very seldom Charlie." That in its 20th century way is a free, and backhanded,

translation of the very old Coast Guard motto, "Semper Paratus"—Always Ready.

Guarding the coast from outside influences is at the moment of minor importance to the 14 Coast Guard stations between Sandy Hook and Cape May. Their broad concern is to guard the people who frequent the coast—very often to guard them against their own follies.

TODAY every man who can scrape up a down payment on anything from an outboard motor to a yacht is a skipper. Small matter whether he knows the rules of the road from a davit; no one examines him for his knowledge and his transgressions are difficult to punish.

(Continued on Following Page)

This is the tenth of a series of articles on the New Jersey Shore. In the next installment the writer will review the history of hotels and hotelmen along the 125-mile sunswept strand and the coming of "drive inns" known as motels.

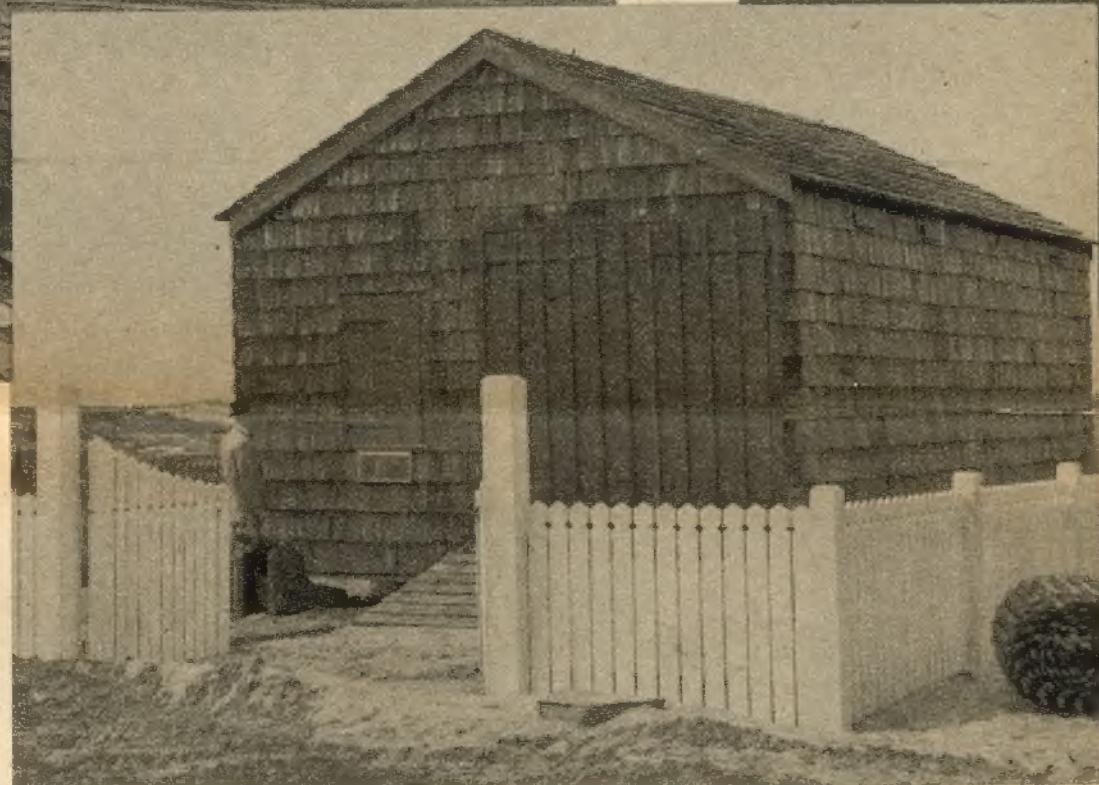
NEW JERSEY'S COASTLINE GUARDIANS



Time for "Charlie," that rare relaxation period which occurs when a boat is laid up for repairs. Scene is at Hook Station.



Studying chart of Sandy Hook Bay area assigned to their station are BMC Richard Terhune and Lt. Cmdr. Benjamin Kowalski.



This tiny shack at Sandy Hook housed the nation's first lifesaving station following Congressional authorization in 1848.

(Continued From Preceding Page)

From the time the first boat motors roar in April and May until most private boats are laid up in October or November, the Coast Guard is Semper Paratus, and then some. Thousands of fishermen in boats of all sizes stream out into the open sea off the New Jersey coast. Nothing surprises a Coast Guardsman; a 14-foot rowboat with a stalled outboard motor 15 miles at sea is commonplace.

This is a relatively new problem, one assuming tremendous proportions in the wake of the phenomenal growth of power boating in the past decade or so. Far too many of the men who now go down to sea in ships (you'll pardon the expression when applied to rowboats) have neither knowledge of, nor respect for, the treacherous ocean they travel.

The Coast Guard (by that name) dates only from 1915, the year the Revenue Cutter Service and the Lifesaving Service were combined into one service under Treasury Depart-

ment control. The Revenue Cutter Service began in 1790, but lifesaving, in an organized way, didn't come into being until 1848—and therein lies a classic New Jersey story.

No official compilation is available of the number of ships that died on the New Jersey coast from the beginning of recorded time until about 1910, when shipwrecks became a rarity. Most estimates range well above a total of 500, and one compiler insists that at least 2,200 ships met their doom off our coast.

Many factors contributed to the piling up of sea-smashed derelicts upon these shores—the heavy traffic bound to and from New York, the narrow shoals off the curving shore, the strong inshore currents, the savagery with which storms pound the Atlantic coast, the poor navigational aids available to 18th and 19th century sailors.

There are recorded measures of wreckdom. Jacob W. Morris of Long



Branch estimated that prior to 1845 at least 15 ships met doom every year between Sandy Hook and Point Pleasant. A Dr. Reed of Atlantic City reported 64 vessels aground on Absecon Beach between 1847 and 1856. In 1878 Rev. Mr. Brown of Point Pleasant listed 125 vessels wrecked in the preceding 40 years on 24 miles of beachfront between Point Pleasant and Barnegat.

Tragic tales of sea disaster abound in New Jersey Shore literature. They tell of beautiful ships pounded to pieces on treacherous shoals only a few hundred feet from safety. They tell of wreck after wreck in which every human aboard died within sight of helpless rescuers on shore. They chronicle heroic rescues in the face of overwhelming odds, but a wreck almost invariably meant horror.

History pinpoints a turning point: Aug. 13, 1839.

THAT day Dr. William A. Newell of New Egypt stood on the strand and watched 14 men of the grounded Spanish brig *Terasto* perish as they tried to swim 300 yards to safety. Dr. Newell's quick mind figured that a line could be shot from a shortened blunderbuss across the rigging of a ship aground on the shoals. That line, in turn, could be used to pull a heavy rope out from shore to the stricken vessel.

The Monmouth County physician eventually went to Congress and there in 1848 he pushed through an appropriation of \$10,000 for lifesaving stations. The first such station, complete with Dr. Newell's life-line invention, was built on Sandy Hook—and that tiny building still exists (although re-

cently moved to Twin Lights Museum on the Highlands of Navesink).

Simultaneously, Joseph Francis of Toms River perfected a corrugated metal lifeboat and a non-sinkable life car. These, used with Newell's life-line, made the saving of lives a science rather than something tinged with luck and/or Providence.

Newell's line and Francis' life car proved themselves beyond question on Jan. 12, 1850, when the Scottish brig *Ayrshire*, with 201 immigrants aboard, sprang a leak in the bilge and lost her masts off Absecon beach. Volunteer fishermen shot a lifeline across the *Ayrshire's* hull, hauled a life car out to the ship, and for two days they worked—finally rescuing all but one of the 201 imperiled passengers. The Francis lifesaving device has been preserved for posterity and is on display at the Smithsonian Institution, national treasure chest, in Washington, D.C.

VOLUNTEERS manned the early stations until an 1878 reorganization provided for paid crews from Sept. 1 to May 1. By 1900, 42 stations were strung between Sandy Hook and Cape May, many of them on the wildest portions of the New Jersey Shore.

Their success was startling, even when measured by unglamorous statistics. Between 1871 and 1877, for example, out of 6,327 persons aboard 332 vessels wrecked on our shores, only 55 lost their lives. In 1890, with 62 shipwrecks, not a soul met death.

Paradoxically, despite the impressive lessening of fatalities, the two victims most ravished by the dark sea met their fates after the Lifesaving Service began. They were the *Pow-*

hatan and the *New Era*, both wrecked in 1854, curiously enough.

The *Powhatan* grounded off Long Beach Island during a freak April snowstorm in the early morning hours of April 18, 1854. Volunteers struggled to get help to the stricken vessel, but all day long the passengers fell from the vessel and drowned in twos and threes. Finally, at 5 p.m., a great wave swept over the ship and drowned all who remained of the 311 passengers and 29 crewmen aboard the doomed ship when she struck the bar.

STUPIDITY, cowardice and ignorance combined aboard the *New Era* on Nov. 13, 1854, to bring frightful death to more than 300 German immigrants off Deal Beach. The *New Era* grounded 500 yards offshore and panic-stricken officers and crewmen fought one another and the passengers for the ship's lifeboats. The captain and three crewmen escaped alone in a boat meant for 50 passengers, their craven behavior highlighted by the terrified screams of those they abandoned.

As darkness fell on Nov. 13 more than 400 men, women and children remained on the *New Era*. Rescuers brought 135 ashore Nov. 14, but before the day ended all the remaining passengers had been swept into the waves.

Dedicated men manned the lifeboat stations which the Treasury Department moved into its Coast Guard. They had to be dedicated; on a salary "not to exceed \$700 per annum" (the 1900 rate) a man didn't get rich. Even the superintendent knew no luxury—he received \$1,200 a year, for super-



Maintenance of navigational aids such as this buoy light and gong off Hook is one of many duties assigned to Coast Guard. LEFT: Airview of the service headquarters in Atlantic City.

vising 42 stations along the entire coast!

The number of men in a station crew equalled the number of oars required to pull the station's largest boat, normally six oars. An extra man came on the payroll Dec. 1 to give the crew a man on shore to take care of all shore duties. Sickness or death? Lifesaving crews weren't supposed to get sick or die.

OUT in the dreaded winter nights went these forerunners of the Coast Guard, out in sleet and snow and gales and freezing rain. "All I know is the regulations book says you have to go out," declared one old-timer. "It doesn't say anything about coming back." Usually they came back because this was a rugged breed of man—underpaid, undermanned, poor in everything but raw courage and eagerness to help victims of the sea they loved.

Gradually the shipwreck threat subsided as sailing vessels gave way to steamboats, as navigational aids increased, and eventually as radio came into full use. The tragedy of vessels pounded to pieces on offshore shoals diminished; actually, at the merger of the Revenue Cutter and Lifesaving services in 1915, shipwrecks had ceased to be a No. 1 concern off the New Jersey coast.

The Coast Guard's revenue cutters never received a stiffer workout than that experienced during prohibition. Rum runners found this long coastline, once the natural scourge of legitimate shipping, perfect for getting illegal alcohol to a nation far thirstier

(Continued on Following Page)

COAST GUARD

(Continued From Preceding Page)

than it ever had been before the law said it couldn't drink.

Rum runners flaunted their power—on Raritan Bay, on the 127 miles of New Jersey beachfront, in the inlets and coves, through the thoroughfares and lagoons of southern New Jersey. Their powerful boats roared close to shore, kept in constant discipline by powerful ship-to-shore radio.

PROHIBITION put the Coast Guard in a thankless position. The "Rummies" had everything on their side—money, ruthless leaders, political aid, public opinion. The boats of the rum runners made the Coast Guard's "six-bitters" (75-foot cutters) look like scows. Rummies ducked off the sea into inlets; drawbridges opened mysteriously without signal for the lawbreaker, then dropped quickly to hold back the Coast Guardsmen while the liquor went safely inland.

Many a big dollar was made along the New Jersey Shore by the "rummies" and their helpers. Pitched battles off the coast between rum runner and Coast Guard brought sounds of gunfire shoreward on the midnight breezes. Even when bigger and faster cutters gave the Coast Guard partial equality on the ocean, the Semper Paratus boys couldn't win. The public thought it needed alcohol; who did the Coast Guard think it was anyway?

Seemingly the Coast Guard lives under a cloud of ingratitude. Few thanked it for doing its duty during prohibition. Many do not thank it today for its unceasing vigilance aimed at protecting private boatmen in an area teeming with potential disaster.

"Potential disaster" are not words used ill-advisedly. New Jersey's Coast Guardsmen are divided into three groups, with headquarters at Sandy Hook, Atlantic City and Cape May. Each of them is busy, but the Sandy Hook group alone covers what may be the most crowded and the most dangerous shipping waters in the world.

OUT in those ocean waters off Sandy Hook are the shipping lanes—Ambrose Channel, carrying ocean liners and freighters to the world's busiest port, and Sandy Hook Channel, carrying tankers and freighters to Perth Amboy and the Kill von Kull. Highly trained veteran pilots guide those mighty ships up the relatively narrow channels.

Coincidentally, off Sandy Hook are some of the best fishing grounds in the country—at places like the Mud Hole, Shrewsbury Rocks, Cholera Bank and the "Acid Slick." To these banks stream thousands of party and private boats from Brooklyn, Long Island and a score of spots along the shore. Unfortunately, unlike the pilots aboard the liners, many who man the boats (not including the party boats, of course) are trained little beyond the point of knowing how to start an outboard motor.

No one says who can fish, when they can fish, what they must know before

heading into the open sea. There are estimated to be between 25,000 and 30,000 power boats of all sizes in the Sandy Hook-Seaside Heights area, and on Saturdays and Sundays thousands of boats vie for position in the inlets and on the high seas. As many as 1,600 boats pass out of Manasquan Inlet on a Sunday morning.

Out of what could be chaos the Coast Guard—and such volunteer aids as the Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadrons—must seek some order. They must shepherd even that occasional "pilot" who resents protection or advice. They must do so discreetly and politely; a harsh word to a rowboat pilot (or yachtsman) drifting in front of an oncoming freighter might start a congressional inquiry.

ONE way to fight trouble is to prevent it. With that in mind, the Coast Guard's two 83-foot cutters in the

oped engine trouble and headed back for Idlewild Airport. A Coast Guard air escort from Floyd Bennett Field picked up the crippled plane and escorted it north. Thus far—routine.

Then at 1:15 a.m. the Manasquan station was alerted for possible emergency help and the crew started to warm up the 83-foot cutter. At 1:35 a.m. flashed the word: "The plane has ditched, 35 miles east of Asbury Park." Within four minutes after being ordered into duty, the cutter headed out through Manasquan Inlet for the disaster scene.

SOON after, the Sandy Hook 83-footer was alerted and for the next 20 or 30 minutes orders came in to dispatch 40-footers from various points. The Manasquan 83-foot cutter arrived on the ditching scene at 4:24 p.m. and other boats arrived within the next hour to take up the apparently hopeless search for the 74 pas-

Charlie because they have so much to do. When major jobs at sea are done, they must do a multitude of beach duties.

THEY must keep their boats ready to roar at a moment's notice. They must keep electronic gear in constant readiness. They must regulate the loading of explosives on Navy ships at the Leonardo pier. They must aid in port security. They must supply personnel and equipment for the lightships and lighthouses along the New Jersey Shore. They must patrol channels. They must make boardings and inspect small craft.

Help comes from the Coast Guard Auxiliary, an outgrowth of World War II, and from Power Squadrons. The Auxiliary, composed of qualified New Jersey Shore boatmen, conducts classes for motor boatists (one recent class at Manasquan High School drew 250 persons). Power Squadrons conduct similar classes. The auxiliary also conducts courtesy examinations of boats to check equipment and issues a decal of approval (something like an automobile inspection sticker).

Two periods of time particularly plague the Coast Guard—April and May, when boatmen are getting the bugs out of their craft, and August and September, when fishing is best offshore. Still, action is a year-around matter. In an average year for the Sandy Hook group alone, as many as 2,300 boats are boarded for inspection and as many as 1,200 calls for assistance are answered.

This activity threatens to engulf the thinly spread ranks of the Coast Guard—now operating much of the time with station complements at 75 per cent or lower of authorized personnel. Coast Guard recruits are not as readily available as they once were but it is interesting to note that New Jersey plays a significant role in preparing "boots" for action at the Cape May Receiving Center.

CAPE MAY'S center is the only Coast Guard recruit training camp now in operation east of the Mississippi. Here 12 weeks of training get as many as 1,200 men ready at once in a rigorous program designed to give the boots both theory and practical sea experience. The base, originally a World War I Naval Training Station, has been a Coast Guard boot camp since 1948.

Out of Cape May go the boots-turned-Coast Guardsmen. They go to patrol in the frigid Arctic waters, to far-off weather patrol, to maintain buoys and beacons in many harbors and, if war comes, to man the landing boats on far-off shores. In philosophy and spirit the crews aboard the sleek 83-footers are one with the volunteers of days gone by.

No matter what else they learn at Cape May, the boots know well the meaning of "Semper Paratus." They are Always Ready because they mean to be Coast Guardsmen, who rest only when the sea no longer seeks to victimize those who flirt with it. They seldom sit still; their lives run the gamut from Alpha to Bravo (and, very seldom, Charlie).



Coast Guardsmen stage breeches buoy drill at Sandy Hook station.

Sandy Hook group run constant patrol over and around the fishing banks and through the shipping lanes. The cutters patrol for 48 hours running during the busiest times of year, then slip into port (Manasquan for one, Sandy Hook for the other).

Six hours of Bravo layover is the maximum that can be allowed the 83-footers in summer. That allows for minor repairs (sparkplugs, oil change, etc.). In rough weather, of course, even the six hours is tentative. As a Sandy Hook officer says: "Heaven help the boat crew that needs six hours to get under way in an emergency."

This routine patrol by the 83-footers, and to a lesser extent the 30 and 40-footers, never makes the headlines. Such public attention is reserved for the great emergencies—as, for example, June 20, 1956, when a Super Constellation bound for Venezuela devel-

sengers and crew members aboard the missing air liner. Several boats were recalled but the search went on all day, through the night and through the following day.

Nothing ever was found except some clothing and personal articles, but the Coast Guard didn't stop looking. Nevertheless, routine work had to go on. Within two days all the excitement was gone—replaced by routine patrol and by a wide range of unspectacular duties. Very seldom are Alpha and Bravo status spectacular.

Much goes on in and around those neat white "Lifeboat Stations" so familiar to summer shore visitors. Coast Guardsmen's duties include search and rescue (this may get their names in the papers), enforcement of laws (this makes them unpopular), and keeping aids to navigation—buoys, channel markers, etc., in tip-top shape.

Coast Guardsmen are Very Seldom